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ABSTRACT

This study tests the basic assumptions underlying Fishbein's Model of Attitudes by correlating an individual's selective exposure to types of television programs (situation comedies, family drama, and action/adventure) with the attitudinal similarity between individual attitudes and attitudes characterized on the programs. Twenty-three college students provided the data by self-report, and the data were analyzed at three of the four levels of Fishbein's Model: beliefs about outcomes, attitudes toward the behavior (exposure), and behavioral intention to expose oneself to the information. The fourth level, the actual behavior (exposure to the information), did not apply to the study. Results of the study provide partial support for the predictive validity of attitude similarity on selective exposure within the model's framework. (RL)

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A Theoretical Model for Selective Exposure Research

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Fundamental to most theories of human behavior is the notion that individuals scan their environment for potential sources of information and then decide to expose or not expose themselves to that information. Cognitive theorists assume that individuals are conscious, rational decision-makers, capable of self-direction and often guided by the desire to maintain consistency in their actions.[1] Behaviorists assume that individuals discriminate between alternative stimuli and are attracted to those stimuli rewarding to them.[2] While such diverse theoretical camps agree upon the concept of selectivity, they do not often agree about the criteria on which selectivity is based. Such criteria have included the desire to obtain novel information, supportive information, utilitarian information and physiologically arousing information.[3]

Perhaps the most frequently researched criteria deals with an individual's desire for information supportive of his/her beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. Cognitive Dissonance Theory argues that individuals attempt to maintain a state of consonance, seeking belief-congruent information and avoiding dissonance producing information, i.e., belief-discrepant information.[4] To test this theory, several experimental studies were conducted in which individuals were given the opportunity to expose themselves to belief-congruent or belief-discrepant information. After reviewing the initial research in the area, Freedman and Sears concluded "laboratory evidence does not support the hypothesis that people prefer to be exposed to supportive as opposed to non-supportive information."[5] Several years later, Mills examined several new experiments and concluded that" . . . the current evidence concerning interest in supporting and

discrepant information warrants the conclusion that people tend to seek out supporting information and avoid discrepant information."[6] Furthermore, Mills found that the desire for supportive information varied with an individual's certainty that he/she holds a correct position.[7] Interestingly, Sears reviewed the same literature and reported in the same volume that ". . .there is no empirical evidence indicating a general preference for supportive information over nonsupportive information, regardless of whether the test is conducted under neutral, high-dissonance, or low-confidence conditions."[8]

While considerable controversy exists about the desire of individuals to seek only supportive information, there is agreement that research evidence supports the notion that people are exposed to a disproportionate amount of supportive information.[9] Indeed, considerable field research conducted in mass communication indicates that selective exposure to supportive information is a pervasive phenomenon.[10] Current research indicates that television program preference seems to operate along the lines of selective exposure.[11]

The obvious question asks: Why do we observe such selectivity in exposure to mass media messages and such inconsistent selectivity in the laboratory? To examine this question, a model was developed which attempts to predict the likelihood that individuals will expose themselves to certain kinds of television programming based on the desire to obtain supportive information. Development of this model is based upon four tasks: 1) specifying the antecedent conditions necessary for selective exposure to occur; 2) specifying the key independent variables that produce selective exposure; 3) specifying the dependent variables that reflect selective exposure; 4) predicting

the influence of the independent variables on the decision to selectively expose oneself to supportive information.

Antecedent Conditions

Selective exposure is defined as the desire of individuals to obtain information consistent with their self-concepts and avoid information that is inconsistent with their self-concepts. This definition assumes that the causal factor of selectivity is the psychological predisposition for consistency with self-conception. Consequently, it is necessary to specify antecedent conditions which should exist for this psychological predisposition to operate.

The first condition is that an individual needs a well-formed self-concept, i.e., the person knows what positions he/she believes in. Obviously, a person cannot have a defined position about all topics. Consequently, if we examine a topic about which an individual has little information, selective exposure will not operate.

Second, it is assumed that the individual has sufficient information about a potential source so that he/she can form some tentative hypothesis about whether the source will provide belief-congruent or belief-discrepant information. Research on the attribution process indicates that individuals form hypotheses about other people or objects even on the basis of limited information.[12] While this condition does not assume that such hypotheses are entirely accurate, it does assume that an individual with absolutely no information about a source may operate in a random manner.

Third, it is necessary that an individual has a variety of sources available from which to choose. In some cases, the desire to seek

only supportive information may be thwarted by the limited availability of such information.

Fourth, an individual must have freedom of choice about what sources to expose him or herself to. Psychological, social or physical compulsion may restrain an individual's desire to obtain supportive information.

Fifth, it is assumed that the individual must be observed in a number of situations. Attribution Theory argues that unless we observe an individual in multiple situations, we cannot be confident that his/her behavior is not situationally determined.[13] If we attempt to predict an individual's exposure to a single message, it is entirely possible that we may be inaccurate because of accidental exposure or exposure based upon inaccurate perceptions of what kind of information the source would provide.

Independent Variable

Within this model, the key independent variable is attitudinal similarity which is defined as the perception that a source's evaluation of a behavior or object is congruent with the perceiver's own evaluation of that behavior or object. This definition assumes that a person forms a hypothesis about how a source is likely to behave toward some object and how the source judges the morality of the action. By comparing his/her own evaluations of the morality of the source's behavior with the perceptions of the source's morality judgements, the individual can determine how similar he/she is to the source.

Considerable research has been conducted using the notion of attitudinal similarity to predict whether an individual will be attracted to another. Byrne has argued that the more similar another person's opinions, interests or personality characteristics are to those of a perceiver, the more the perceiver will be attracted to the person.[14] The causal mechanism is similar to that expressed in the definition of selective exposure: the desire for consensual validation for attitudes, opinions and beliefs.[15]

The research of Byrne and his associates has demonstrated a positive relation between similarity and attraction.[16] The objects of similarity have included personality inventories, ability and intelligence tests, information about spending habits and self-descriptions of personality traits and behavior patterns.[17]

The analysis provided by Byrne can be applied to the decision by a television viewer to expose him/herself to a certain type of television programming. Individuals tend to judge the behavior of television characters much as they do individuals observed in unmediated situations. Some research supports the notion that children tend to perceive television portrayals as being realistic.[18] Furthermore, an analysis of adolescent viewers indicates that they are capable of predicting the likelihood that their favorite television characters will engage in a given mode of conflict resolution.[19] If viewers can make such predictions about the likelihood that television characters will engage in some action, viewers should also be able to form dispositional hypotheses about how the character judges the morality of his/her behavior.[20]

Television viewers are predicted to compare their perceptions of the television characters with their own and tend to expose themselves to those who are perceived to be similar.

Attitudinal similarity consists of two separate components: attitudinal discrepancy and attitudinal approval. Attitudinal discrepancy is formed by taking the absolute difference between the perceived television character's evaluation of behavior and the viewer's own evaluation of that behavior. Since television characters vary in the likelihood that they would engage in a given behavior, the absolute difference is multiplied by the perceived likelihood that the character will perform the behavior.[21] Finally, these values are summed across all actions.[22] The equation for attitudinal discrepancy follows:

$$\text{Attitudinal Discrepancy} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} (\,|\text{TVCM} - \text{TVVM}|\,) * p(\text{TVCB})$$

TVCM = Perceived television character's morality judgment of behavior
TVVM = Television viewer's morality judgment of behavior
p(TVCB) = Perceived probability that television character will engage in the behavior

It is important to note that this equation provides an inverse indication of attitudinal similarity such that the greater the value of the equation (hence greater the attitudinal discrepancy) the less the attitudinal similarity.

Attitudinal approval is formed by summing the products of the viewer's judgment of whether the television character should be portrayed performing a given action multiplied by the likelihood that the television character would perform the action. The following equation represents attitudinal approval:

$$\text{Attitudinal Approval} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} (\text{TVBS}) * p(\text{TVCB})$$

TVBS = Television viewer's judgment that the television character's action should be portrayed

p(TVCB) = Perceived probability that television character will engage in the behavior

Attitudinal approval provides a direct indication of attitudinal similarity such that as the value of attitudinal approval increases, attitudinal similarity increases.

Dependent Variables

The obvious dependent variable is exposure which generally is operationalized as a choice variable or an after the fact self-report of exposure. However, current research on behavior provides some insights into a more complex process of exposure. Instead of simply examining choice and after the fact behavior, we should orient toward predicting exposure at different levels.

In a complex analysis of behavior, Fishbein and Ajzen suggest that one must focus on more than attitudes to predict another's behavior.[23] Specifically, they argue that a person's behavioral intention can be predicted by their attitude toward the behavior, and perception of social pressures. Normally, behavioral intention should be highly correlated with a person's actual behavior.[24] Their entire scheme is as follows:

Informational Base $\sum b_i e_i$
Beliefs about consequences of behavior
Evaluations of consequences

Informational Base $\sum b_i m_i$
Normative Beliefs
Motivation to Comply

Attitude Toward Behavior A_B

Subjective Norm SN

Behavioral Intention

Since selective exposure is a form of behavior, it can be analyzed within the Fishbein and Ajzen approach. Their model suggests that selective exposure be analyzed at four levels.

Level 1

At the first level, Fishbein and Ajzen argue that people make judgments about the likelihood that certain outcomes will occur as a result of their behavior, and they evaluate the outcomes. Two sets of outcomes are likely to be considered by the television viewer. The first set of outcomes arises from an analysis of the uses and gratifications of media use. Greenberg reports eight factors of uses and gratifications: relaxation, companionship, learning about things, habits, to pass time, learning about myself, arousal and to forget.[25] While these factors dealt with the ends of television viewing, it is possible to use them as projected outcomes arising from viewing television programming. A second set of outcomes stems from the physiological arousal an individual experiences from viewing belief-discrepant information. Donohew and Palmgreen observed that an individual experiences significant arousal as a result of exposure to counter-information.[26] Given it is likely that an individual has encountered some belief-discrepant information in the past, he/she is likely to realize that future exposure will lend to such arousal.

Attitudinal similarity should influence the individual's judgments about the evaluation of outcomes. Stalling observed that attribute similarity influenced the evaluations that individuals make of attributes such that positive traits were perceived to be similar and negative traits perceived to be dissimilar.[27] It is possible that television viewers are likely to

perceive outcomes of television programs that present attitudinally similar information to be positive. Specifically, we predict:

> As attitudinal discrepancy increases, the likelihood that outcomes arising from exposure will be evaluated negatively increases.
>
> As attitudinal approval increases, the likelihood that outcomes arising from exposure will be evaluated positively increases.

Level 2

At the second level, we focus on the person's attitude toward the behavior or exposure. Fishbein and Ajzen view an attitude as an evaluative construct that may be measured directly (by evaluative semantic differential scales) or computationally (by examining the sum of the subjective probability that each outcome of a behavior will occur, multiplied by the evaluation of each outcome).[28] Research indicates a high correlation between the direct and computational measures.[29]

In terms of selective exposure, we might expect that the greater the attitudinal similarity, the more positive the attitude toward exposing oneself to the message. The following hypotheses are predicted:

> As attitudinal discrepancy increases, the more negative the attitude (both direct and computational) toward exposing oneself to the information.
>
> As attitudinal approval increases, the more positive the attitude (both direct and computational) toward exposing oneself to the information.

Level 3

The third level of exposure deals with the behavioral intention to expose oneself to information. At this point, we expect that the

influence of attitudinal similarity may begin to weaken. Fishbein and Ajzen argue that a person's behavioral intention is determined by more than his/her beliefs about probable outcomes and evaluation of the behavior. People partially determine their behavioral intention by examining what they perceive their significant others think they should do.[30] Two measures are made of this subjective norm: the first measure is direct and is oriented toward how likely the individual thinks people important to him/her think he/she should perform the behavior; the second measure is computational and measures the sum of the likelihood that each significant other would advise the individual to perform the behavior (normative beliefs) multiplied by the individual's motiviation to comply with their suggestions.[31] It is doubtful that attitudinal similarity will influence the perceptions of these significant others. Indeed, it is possible that individuals may wish to evaluate a source of information on the basis of attitudinal similarity and have that desire contradicted by what other people want them to do.

As a result, we expect that among individuals who base most of their decision to expose on their own psychological dispositions and little on what others think, selective exposure will be strongest. Specifically, we predict:

> As attitudinal discrepancy increases, the behavioral intention to expose oneself to the information decreases.
>
> As attitudinal approval increases, the behavioral intention to expose oneself to the information decreases.

Level 4

The final level deals with the actual exposure itself. Again the correlation between attitudinal similarity may be large depending

upon a number of situations.

Fishbein and Ajzen argue that not only do social pressures tend to impinge on a person's behavior but so do situational characteristics and characteristics of the behavior.[32] If the decision to expose oneself is restricted through violation of the antecedent conditions mentioned earlier, the correlation between attitudinal similarity and exposure will decrease. If the conditions are met, we would predict:

> As attitudinal discrepancy increases, exposure to information decreases
>
> As attitudinal approval increases, exposure to information increases

Finally, it should be noted that the two measures of attitudinal similarity (attitudinal discrepancy and attitudinal approval) may operate together to explain a great deal of variance at each of the levels. At the last two levels (behavioral intention and behavior), attitudinal similarity may also operate with attitude toward the behavior and subjective norm to predict exposure.

To gain some insight into the basic assumptions of this model, a pilot project was undertaken. Specifically, the project focused on the decision to expose oneself to situation comedies, family dramas and action/adventure programs. The model was used to predict exposure at three of the four levels: belief about outcomes, attitude toward exposure and behavioral intention. Since the model was used to predict programming which had not been broadcast, the actual exposure pattern (level 4) was not studied.

Methodology

Sample

Data were collected from 23 students (10 males, 13 females) enrolled in a summer session introductory communication class at a large southern university. The mean age of the students was 22. Of the total sample 9% were communication majors, 4% telecommunication majors and 13% journalism majors (74% were distributed in noncommunication majors). Most of the students were seniors (52%). Of the remaining students 9% were freshman, 26% sophomores and 9% juniors.

In order to examine the antecedent conditions, we asked the students several questions about their ability to view television. First, all students indicated they had access to a TV on a normal evening. Second, the majority of students reported they normally watched the programs they wanted to during the week (60%). Third, all students reported they could receive all three local channels. Finally, students reported if they normally watched situation comedy programs, family drama programs and action/adventure programs. The mean number of situation comedy programs viewed was 6, the mean number of family drama programs viewed was 2, and the mean number of action/adventure programs viewed was 5.

Responses to these questions indicated that the students had the opportunity to view the three types of television programs and their current viewing behavior validated that to some extent they did view each type. Although the available content differed (21 situation comedy programs are available, 6 family drama programs and 24 action/adventure programs) all subjects reported watching at least one program of each type.

Questionnaire

Each student filled out fifty self-administered questions dealing with the three types of programs, situation comedy, family drama and action/adventure. Both verbal and written instructions were provided for the total questionnaire.

Attitudinal Similarity

The first twenty items represented the actions that situation comedy, family drama and action/adventure characters have been observed most frequently portraying. Greenberg, et. al. have observed each of these pro-and anti-social actions portrayed in each type of program.[33] In order to measure the two components of attitudinal similarity four scales followed each action. An example of an action and the four scales follows:

The main characters steal from others.

A. The main characters are

likely _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____unlikely

to steal from others.

B. Stealing from another is portrayed as

moral ____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____immoral

C. I think stealing from another is

moral____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____immoral

D. I think stealing from another

should___ _____ _____ _____ _____. _____should not

be shown on TV.

Each scale was scored from +3 to -3. Scales A and D were multiplied for each action and then summed for attitudinal approval. This scale

could range from +180 to - 180. Scale C was subtracted from scale B and the absolute value of the difference was multiplied by scale A. The value for each action was summed to form attitudinal discrepancy. This scale could range from +360 to -360.

Belief

The beliefs about the outcomes of exposure to the television program types were measured by transforming the uses and gratifications observed by Greenberg and some of the items used in the mood scale into outcomes.[34] Specifically, each of Greenberg's dimensions was translated into a prediction about how likely the uses and gratification would occur and whether it was good or bad. Six of the eight factors in the Mood scale were measured similarly (aggression, concentration, anxiety, depression, affection and pleasantness). Thus, fifteen total items were used as outcomes. Each outcome was measured on two, seven-point scales for likelihood and evaluation, scored from +3 to -3. An example follows:

Watching this type of program helps me forget and escape.

likely _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____unlikely

good _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____bad

Attitude toward behavior

Two measures of attitude toward the behavior were used. Following Fishbein and Ajzen's model, the likelihood that a given outcome will occur was multiplied by its evaluation and sum of all outcomes taken. The scale could range from +135 to -135. The second measure of attitude toward the behavior was more direct consisting of an evaluation on a seven-point scale ranging from good to bad of exposing oneself

to one of the three television program types. It was scored from +3 to -3.

Subjective Norm

Although subjective norm is not predicted to be influenced by attitudinal similarity, it is necessary to examine its influence in predicting behavioral intention. Two measures of subjective norm were used. First, respondents were asked how likely each of five significant others (parents, spouse and/or lover, professor, others who watch TV) thought they should watch each of three programs types and how motivated the subjects were to comply with each significant other. The sum of the products of the two judgments was used as a computational measure of subjective norm. This scale ranged from +3 to -3 and the final measure ranged from +45 to -45. Second, the more direct measure asked respondents to indicate whether most people important to them felt they should watch each of the three programs types. The judgment was made on a seven-point scale ranging from should to should not and scored +3 to -3.

Behavioral Intention

Two measures of behavior intention were used for each of three television program types. In order to determine if attitudinal similarity would influence a person's intention to expose him or herself to a specific television program, we developed an item which asked respondents how likely they would watch a new situation comedy, family drama and action/adventure program in the fall. Lists of all new network situation comedies, family dramas and action/adventure programs beginning in the fall were obtained. We selected one of each program type: "CHIPS," "The Fitzpatricks," and "Operation Petticoat," these programs were selected because of their pilots were not shown in the area and the students would not be likely to have any information other than what the researchers provided.

Each item provided the network description of the program, including plots and characters; no reference was made to time, night or network. Following each description, respondents were asked how likely they would watch these programs, barring unforeseen circumstances. Their responses were made on seven-point scales ranging from likely to unlikely and scored from +3 to -3.

The second measure of behavioral intention deal with the students intention to watch any situation comedy, family drama or action/adventure program. Responses were made on a seven-point scale ranging from likely to unlikely and scored from +3 to -3.

Results

To examine the hypotheses in this piloc study, zero-order and multiple correlation coefficients were computed between the two components of attitudinal similarity (attitudinal discrepancy and attitudinal approval) and the different levels of selective exposure.

Given the sample is small, extreme cases could bias the correlations; to check for these biases, individual cases were examined for outliers but none occured. The standard deviations for the variables analyzed (Table 1) indicates the dispersion was relatively tight around most means.

Level One

Pearson correlations were computed between attitudinal discrepancy and approval and the evaluations made of the fifteen outcomes of viewing each program type. Table 2 presents the correlations.

The correlations between attitudinal approval and the evaluations of the outcomes were, in most cases, in the predicted direction. When examining the correlations with outcomes from viewing situation comedies, we find that 10 correlations are above .38 ($p. < .05$); none are negative. When examining the outcomes from viewing family dramas, 8 of the correlations are above .40 ($p. < .05$) and all are positive. However, only 5 of the correlations with outcomes from viewing action/adventure programs are above .40 ($p. < .05$) and two of the significant correlations are negative.

The correlations between attitudinal discrepancy and the evaluations of outcomes were predicted to be negative. When examining the evaluations of outcomes from viewing situation comedies, 8 of the correlations were above -.35 ($p. < .05$) and all were negative. Only 4 correlations with the evaluation of outcomes for family dramas were above -.42 ($p. < .05$) and all were negative. Finally, only 3 of correlations with evaluation of outcomes for action/adventure programs was above -.38 ($p. < .05$) and all were negative.

While not all correlations were significant, most were in the predicted direction: positive correlations between attitudinal approval and evaluation of outcomes (13 with situation comedies, 15 with family dramas and 7 with action/adventure programs) and negative correlations between attitudinal discrepancy and outcomes (14 with situation comedies, 11 with family dramas and 12 with action/adventure programs).

An examination of the multiple correlations in Table 3 indicate that attitudinal discrepancy and approval are significantly correlated with evaluations of outcomes from viewing situation comedies in 5 of the 15 cases, varying between .17 and .84.

The multiple correlations with the evaluations of outcomes from viewing family dramas are significant in 6 of the 15 correlations, varying between .21 and .85. The multiple correlations with the evaluations of outcomes from viewing action/adventure programs are significant in 2 of the 15 correlations, varying between .07 and .67. No consistent pattern emerges in the beta weights. In some cases the attitudinal discrepancy is the most important predictor and in other cases, attitudinal approval is the strongest predictor.

Level 2

When examining the correlation between the two components of attitudinal similarity and the two measures of attitude toward the behavior, we find the correlations are in the predicted direction. Table 4 presents the zero-order and multiple correlations. The correlations between attitudinal approval and attitude toward the behavior were predicted to be positive; all 6 correlations are positive ranging from .50 to .74 and are significant ($p. < .05$). The predicted negative correlation between attitudinal discrepancy and attitude was observed in 5 of the 6 cases. However, the size of the correlations varied widely from -.22 to -.56 and only 2 were significant at $p. < .05$.

When examining the multiple correlations between attitudinal discrepancy and attitudinal approval and attitude toward the behavior, the multiple correlations ranged from .51 to .74 and five were significant at $p < .05$. The beta weights indicate the strongest predictor in all 6 cases was attitudinal approval.

Level 3

Tables 5 and 6 present the relevant correlations. As predicted, most of the correlations between attitudinal approval and behavioral intention (both specific and general) were positive. Also as predicted, most of the correlations between attitudinal discrepancy and behavioral intention (both specific and general) were negative. The correlations for both measures varied in terms of strength (.03 to .37 for attitudinal approval and -.11 and -.48 for attitudinal discrepancy).

When examining the influence of both attitudinal approval and discrepancy in a multiple regression equation, the correlations ranged from .03 to .52. When adding the two measures from Fishbein and Ajzen's model, we find that the correlations with the direct measures range from .44 to .73 and the correlations with the theoretical measures range from .33 to .57.

The beta weights for the four variables indicate that no consistent pattern emerges as to which of the variables is the strongest predictor.

Discussion

While the conclusions drawn from this limited sample must be of a tentative nature, the directions of the correlations provide support for the notion of selective exposure based on attitudinal similarity.

The correlations between the two measures of attitudinal similarity (attitudinal discrepancy and attitudinal approval) are in the predicted direction, although some are not significant. Furthermore, the levels notion seems useful: attitudinal similarity influences the beliefs about the outcomes of exposure and attitude toward the behavior and attitudinal similarity plus attitude toward the behavior and subjective norm influences behavioral intention.

Unfortunately, we have no measure of actual exposure to the programs themselves. Assuming no impediments to viewing occurred, it is likely that behavioral intention could predict the behavior of this sample. As a result, the influence of attitudinal similarity on behavior may also be strong.

Several follow-up research projects might be undertaken. First, it would be important to examine the effect of the model on several different populations. For example, at earlier ages, the influence of attitudinal similarity may decrease as the influence of parental and peer supervision over television viewing increases. Certainly, we might predict that as the individual grows older, the attitudinal component of Fishbein and Ajzen's model may become more influential over exposure. As the attitude toward the behavior becomes more influential than subjective norm, we might expect that attitudinal similarity will become more powerful and selective exposure should increase at all four levels.

Second, we may want to examine the intervention of other people into the process in order to break the chain of selective exposure. If individuals only expose themselves to television they find attitudinally similar, their orientation is toward maintaining the status quo. It may be possible through intervention from others to strengthen the subjective norm component and override the selectivity based on attitudinal similarity.

Third, it would be interesting to establish the influence of attitudinal similarity in comparison to other criteria that people use to gain information. As indicated previously, a number of alternative criteria exist which might be as influential or more influential than attitudinal similarity.

Fourth, it might be important to examine other phenomenon than TV characters. Although the model has been applied to television viewing behavior it might well be applied to other exposure behavior, for example, interpersonal attraction. Fishbein and Ajzen argue that attitudinal similarity may influence interpersonal attraction through a similar process.[35]

However, from our point of view, the most important research and policy orientation stems from the potential influence of selective exposure on media effects. If individuals decide to expose themselves to television programs on the basis of how similar character's actions are to their own, the notion that television reinforces behavioral and attitudinal patterns of viewers seems valid. We might well expect violent people to seek out programming consistent with their attitudes toward violence and their violent behavior. The opposite might also be true; individuals with pro-social attitudes and behaviors may well seek out information reinforcing their position.

Perhaps one of the most important policy questions raised from this research deals with expanding the opportunities for viewing through cable television. Expanding the alternative stations available for reception may not necessarily expand alternative programming. In other words, the individual who uses cable television could conceivably

select from the media menu a diet of attitudinally similar material.

In partial support for this effect of cable television, Roloff and Greenberg have data which indicate that adolescent cable viewers and adolescent noncable viewers differ significantly in the modes of conflict resolution they employ. Part of these differences can be accounted for by the capability of adolescent cable viewers to expose themselves to more television programmirg.

In summary, this paper argues that selective exposure based upon attitudinal similarity be examined at four levels: beliefs about outcomes, attitudes toward the behavior (exposure), behavioral intention to expose oneself to the information and the actual exposure behavior to the information. In a pilot study, partial support was found for the direction of correlations at the first three levels: beliefs, attitudes and behavioral intention. No measure was made of the fourth level: behavior.

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Kelley.

21

Research presented in Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen, Belief, Attitude, Intention and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1975), 144-155, supports the notion that probability factors have an important influence on perceptions and decision making.

22

Recent research reported by Bradley S. Greenberg, Charles Atkin, Nadyne Edison, Felipe Korzenny, Pro-Social and Anti-Social Behaviors on Commercial Television in 1976-77, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of Child Development, 1977) reported that television characters were most likely to engage in twenty behaviors: shove or push, physically threaten, shoot, violate others' privacy, hit others, reject or insult others, verbally threaten, yell, steal, lie, trick, share, cooperate, help, kiss, embrace, show concern, show sympathy, be honest, and self-disclose.

23

Fishbein and Ajzen, 334.

24

Fishbein and Ajzen, 370-371.

25

Bradley S. Greenberg, "Gratifications of Television Viewing and Their Correlates for British Children," in The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research, ed. Jay Blumler and Elihu Katz (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1974), 71-92.

26

Lewis Donohew and Phil Palmgreen, "An Investigation of Mechanisms' of Information Selection," Journalism Quarterly, 48 (1971), 627-39.

27

Robert Stalling, "Personality Similarity and Evaluative Meaning as Conditioners of Attration," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 14, (1970), 77-82.

28

Computational formula is as follows:

$$\text{Attitude} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} b_i e_i$$

b_i = beliefs about probability outcome will occur
e_i = evaluation of outcome

29

For review of literature, see Fishbein and Ajzen, 225-228.

30

Fishbein and Ajzen, 302-307.

31

Computational formula is as follows:

$$\text{Subjective Norm} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} b_i mc_i$$

b_i = normative beliefs
mc_i = motivation to comply

32

Fishbein and Ajzen, 302-307.

33

Greenberg, Atkin, Edison and Korzenny, 27-32.

34

Greenberg, 91; Bradley S. Greenberg, "Performance and Message Consequences of Encoding Behavior Under Cognitive Stress," Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1961, contains modified version of Mood scale.

35

Fishbein and Ajzen, 312.

Table 1--Means and Standard Deviations for Variables in the Model

	Situation Comedy		Family Drama		Action/ Adventure	
	$\bar{X}$	sd.	$\bar{X}$	sd.	$\bar{X}$	sd.
Beliefs about Outcomes						
Probability Relaxation	1.6	1.9	1.0	1.5	-.2	2.1
Evaluation Relaxation	2.0	1.5	1.3	1.5	-.2	2.0
Probability Companionship	.6	1.7	.2	1.8	.1	2.0
Evaluation Companionship	.8	1.7	.6	1.4	-.1	1.8
Probability Learn/Life	.2	2.3	1.0	1.6	-.4	2.2
Evaluation Learn/Life	.5	2.2	1.4	1.2	.1	2.0
Probability Entertain	2.2	1.2	1.8	1.7	.9	2.0
Evaluation Entertain	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.7	.7	2.1
Probability Habit	.5	2.2	-.3	2.0	.5	2.2
Evaluation Habit	-1.0	2.1	-.6	1.8	-.4	2.0
Probability Learn/Self	-.6	2.0	.1	1.9	-1.0	2.0
Evaluation Learn/Self	.1	1.5	.8	1.7	.5	1.8
Probability Pass Time	1.8	1.6	1.2	1.8	1.2	1.7
Evaluation Pass Time	-.6	2.1	-.6	1.6	-.4	2.0
Probability Arousing	-.3	1.9	-.3	1.7	-.1	2.3
Evaluation Arousing	.2	1.8	.2	1.1	.4	2.0
Probability Forget/Escape	.6	2.2	-.2	2.0	.1	2.2
Evaluation Forget/Escape	.5	1.8	-.4	1.4	0.0	1.6
Probability Aggression	-1.3	2.0	-1.9	1.3	-.4	2.4
Evaluation Aggression	0.0	1.8	-.1	2.1	-.4	2.0
Probability Concentration	-1.5	1.7	-.5	2.0	-1.3	1.9
Evaluation Concentration	-.3	1.8	.6	1.1	-.5	1.8

Table 1--Continued

	Situation Comedy		Family Drama		Action/ Adventure	
	$\bar{X}$	sd.	$\bar{X}$	sd.	$\bar{X}$	sd.
Beliefs about Outcomes						
Probability Anxiety	1.3	1.8	-.6	1.7	-.3	2.3
Evaluation Anxiety	0.0	1.6	0.0	1.6	-.6	1.8
Probability Depression	-2.0	1.4	-.5	1.7	.9	2.2
Evaluation Depression	-.1	2.2	-.3	1.7	-1.1	1.9
Probability Affection	-1.0	1.6	.1	1.4	-1.5	1.6
Evaluation Affection	0.0	1.6	.7	1.3	-.1	1.7
Probability Pleasant	.7	2.1	.6	2.0	1.2	1.8
Evaluation Pleasant	1.3	1.8	1.3	1.8	-.2	1.8
Attitudinal Similarity						
Attitudinal Approval	22.7	33.5	15.1	31.8	15.5	60.9
Attitudinal Discrepancy	48.9	59.5	62.5	46.7	68.2	53.2
Attitude toward Behavior						
Direct	1.2	1.8	1.3	1.5	.4	1.9
Computational	27.0	31.5	21.3	26.7	12.3	41.1
Subjective Norm						
Direct	.6	1.3	.3	1.5	.3	1.6
Computational	3.9	11.0	5.6	11.4	2.6	11.2
Behavioral Intention						
Specific	-1.3	2.0	-1.1	1.6	-1.5	1.7
General	.2	2.0	-.4	2.0	-1.0	1.8

Table 2--Correlations between Attitudinal Approval and Discrepancy and Beliefs about Outcomes

	Situation Comedy		Family Drama		Action/ Adventure	
	Att. App.	Att. Disc.	Att. App.	Att. Disc.	Att. App.	Att. Disc.
Beliefs about Outcomes						
Evaluation Relaxation	.84!	-.66!	.81!	-.48@	.41@	-.20
Evaluation Companionship	.62!	-.72!	.84!	-.34	.02	.06
Evaluation Learn/Life	.42@	-.61!	.74!	-.25	-.44@	-.23
Evaluation Entertain	.67!	-.48*	.62*	-.13	.40@	-.11
Evaluation Habit	.39@	-.45@	.27	-.36	-.27	-.05
Evaluation Learn/Self	.41@	-.68!	.30	.04	-.53*	-.04
Evaluation Pass Time	.48*	-.22	.18	-.33	.10	-.09
Evaluation Arousing	.44@	-.36@	.53*	.14	-.33	-.15
Evaluation Forget/Escape	.51*	-.33	.40	.00	-.03	.13
Evaluation Agression	.16	-.29	.21	-.43@	-.05	-.45@
Evaluation Concentration	.17	-.10	.50@	-.22	.26	-.39@
Evaluation Anxiety	.36	-.37	.59*	-.56*	.51*	-.19
Evaluation Depression	-.19	-.09	.27	-.43@	.27	-.43@
Evaluation Affection	-.20	.32	.16	.24	-.23	.02
Evaluation Pleasant	.77!	-.44@	.45@	-.11	-.03	-.30

!p.< .001, *p.< .01, @p.< .05

Table 3--Multiple Correlations between Attitudinal Approval and Discrepancy and Beliefs about Outcomes from Exposure.

	Situation Comedy			Family Drama			Action/Adventure		
	Att. App. Beta	Att. Disc. Beta	R	Att. App. Beta	Att. Disc. Beta	R	Att. App. Beta	Att. Disc. Beta	R
Beliefs About Outcomes									
Evaluation Relaxation	.73	-.15	.84!	.78	-.07	.82!	.39	-.10	.42
Evaluation Companionship	.22	-.56	.74!	.92	.15	.85!	.03	.07	.07
Evaluation Learn/Life	-.03	-.64	.61@	.84	.20	.76!	-.53	-.36	.56@
Evaluation Entertain	.67	-.00	.67*	.77	.28	.66@	.39	-.01	.40
Evaluation Habit	.14	-.35	.46	.11	-.30	.37	-.30	-.12	.29
Evaluation Learn/Self	-.14	-.78	.68*	.45	.28	.38	-.57	-.19	.56@
Evaluation Pass Time	.65	.25	.51	.01	-.32	.33	.08	-.07	.12
Evaluation Arousing	.36	-.10	.44	.84	.59	.73*	-.39	-.25	.41
Evaluation Forget/Escape	.55	.05	.51	.56	.30	.47	.01	.13	.13
Evaluation Aggression	-.10	-.36	.30	-.03	-.45	.43	-.18	-.50	.48
Evaluation Concentration	.19	.03	.17	.53	.06	.51	.18	-.34	.42
Evaluation Anxiety	.20	-.23	.40	.41	-.34	.66@	.49	-.07	.51
Evaluation Depression	-.50	-.44	.37	.06	-.40	.43	.17	-.39	.46
Evaluation Affection	.04	.35	.32	.41	.46	.42	-.24	-.04	.23
Evaluation Pleasant	.92	.21	.78!	.54	.17	.47	-.12	-.33	.32

! p.< .001, *p.< .01, @p.< .05

Table 4--Zero-order and Multiple Correlations between Attitudinal Discrepancy and Attitudinal Approval and Attitude toward Behavior

	Attitudinal Discrepancy		Attitudinal Approval		
	Beta	r	Beta	r	R
Direct Attitude Toward Viewing Situation Comedies	-.16	-.56*	.56	.68!	.69*
Computational Attitude Toward Viewing Situation Comedies	.11	-.46*	.82	.74!	.74!
Direct Attitude Toward Viewing Family Dramas	.00	-.34	.65	.65*	.65@
Computational Attitude Toward Viewing Family Dramas	.07	-.22	.54	.50@	.51
Direct Attitude Toward Viewing Action/Adventure	-.15	-.28	.54	.57*	.59@
Computational Attitude Toward Viewing Action/Adventure	.29	.13	.61	.54*	.60@

! p. < .001, *p. < .01, @p. < .05

Table 5--Zero-order and Multiple Correlation Between Attitudinal Discrepancy and Approval and Fishbein and Ajzen's Direct Formula and Behavioral Intention.

	Attitudinal Approval		Attitudinal Discrepancy		Direct Attitude Toward Behavior		Direct Subjective Norm		Att. Sim.	Att. S.N.	
	Beta	r	Beta	r	Beta	r	Beta	r	R	R	R
Specific Behavior Intention Situation Comedy	-.50	.21	-.99	-.48*	-.41	.18	.53	.11	.59	.52@	.19
General Behavior Intention Situation Comedy	-.96	-.17	-.49	-.11	.47	.25	.23	.11	.60	.37	.28
Specific Behavior Intention Family Drama	-.41	.37	-.44	-.45@	..49	.59*	.39	.49@	.73@	.48	.62@
General Behavior Intention Family Drama	-.34	.33	-.44	-.45@	.44	.52*	.27	.38	.65	.47	.53
Specific Behavior Intention Action/ Adventure	-.25	.03	-.23	.01	.00	.13	.58	.40@	.47	.03	.40
General Behavior Intention Action/ Adventure	-.01	.27	-.23	-.19	.19	.36	.29	.28	.44	.30	.39

! p. < .001, *p. < .01, @p. < .05

Table 6--Zero-order and Multiple Correlation between Attitudinal Discrepancy and Approval and Fishbein and Ajzen's Computational Formula and Behavior Intention

	Attitudinal Approval		Attitudinal Discrepancy		Comp. Attitude Toward Behavior		Comp. Subjective Norm		Att. Sim.	Att. S.N.
	Beta	r	Beta	r	Beta	r	Beta	r	R	R	R
Specific Behavior Intention Situation Comedy	-.53	.21	-.70	-.48@	.31	.26	.02	.11	.56	.52@	.26
General Behavior Intention Situation Comedy	-.15	-.17	-.41	-.11	-.45	-.35	.03	-.14	.47	.37	.36
Specific Behavior Intention Family Drama	.08	.37@	-.37	-.45@	.14	.28	.04	.24	.50	.48	.29
General Behavior Intention Family Drama	.25	.33	-.37	-.45@	-.47	-.10	.23	.11	.57	.47	.26
Specific Behavior Intention Action/ Adventure	-.18	.03	-.12	.01	.33	.28	.08	.26	.33	.03	.29
General Behavior Intention Action/ Adventure	-.12	.27	-.22	-.19	.65	.40@	-.21	.16	.48	.30	.45

!p. < .001, *p. < .01, @p. < 05